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ines To An Ancient Live Oak
nd Other Verses of California

By

Laurence Edward Innes

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LINES TO AN ANCIENT LIVE OAK

The branches stood from an ancient tree
Out at angles phenomenally.
The limbs were gnarled of this ancient oak
And a bit grotesque. The sunlight woke
Its lines to life, and strangely made
On the ground beneath odd shapes of shade.
But while I looked on this broken tree,
This grave Señor whose dignity
Was still extant in his ruined state
Where he stood surrounded by flowers elate,
I felt indeed that this Grand Señor
Was gravely guarding some old-time door;
The door had vanished, his grandees fled,
But he kept as he could his faith with the dead.

A SUNSET ON A SILKEN SEA

When the sun and the sea at nightfall came to a place
where their ways must part

I stood on the strand in a strange sweet land that clutched
at a stranger's heart;

I looked on a blue green ocean where the day and the night
had met,

Where violet tips and lavender lips and a million jewels
were set;

I looked on a blue green ocean, it was silk like a fairy's
gown,

And it shimmered away in the dying day to the place
where the sun went down.

I looked on a blue green ocean to a sky dark red like wine,

And the surf was pink in its curling brink and the hands
of Time supine

Lay for a moment idle while the silken soul of that sea

Lay still as death while an angel's breath was drawn in
ecstacy.

I looked on that wonderful ocean where out of a rainbow
sky

The colour there had crept from the air and lay on its
breast to die;

And ever the soft sound beating of waves like a muffled
drum

Seemed ever to say, "God rest the day, for the stars and the
night have come."

I looked on a blue green ocean in the tender tide of the day

And I could not feel that the thing was real, so subtle had
been the play

Of light and shadow that merged in heat that hung in a
filmy haze

Where the sun and sea clung tremulously in the parting of
their ways.

A GARDEN OF DAHLIAS

A garden of Dahlias bloomed by the road
And the traffic went by
With a most careless eye,
Oh never looking,—
Well, scarcely looking—
But this only showed
How little they knew of the red and the brown,
Of the purple and green,
Of the el-e-gant sheen
Of the flowers that glanced upward, then smiling bent down.
You say they were blown by winds passing by?
Oh, maybe so,—well, maybe so—
Oh, I really don't know,
But still I am thinking that Dahlias try
To behave in a modest and ladylike way,
But, oh, how they sigh
When the bold passerby
Fails to observe their most gorgeous array!

THE CHALLENGE OF THE WINDS

When the winds blow from the mountains where the tips
are touched with snow,
The green and rolling valleys where the golden fruit trees
grow
Seem to shiver with the portent of the evil days ahead,
Seem to feel the life about them lying cold, and gray, and
dead.
In the great leaves of the palm trees does the ghostly rustle
run
And the oranges peer fearful to the warm rays of the sun;
All about them roses flutter with a sobbing, catching breath,
And the heart of all the Southland, throbbing wildly,
whispers, "Death?"
"Can it be?" the Pepper mutters to the Eucalyptus tree,
"That the soul of beauty dieth?" Then they look toward
the sea.
Come the warm winds softly blowing from the distant
tropic isles,
Come the warm winds softly blowing; and California
smiles.
And from the laughing ripples of the high ascending sun
Back into the mountains rush the cold winds, one by one;
Then the rose leaves settle softly, then the poppy lifts its
head,
And only on the mountains, where the snow lies, lies the
dead.

ELDER BROTHER OF THE LAND

Grave Redwood men annointed you with latin name.
  And yet, what panoply of state
Could make you greater than you are,
  You who were born great?
Long years before I passed this way
  You cast your shadow, and the shade
Through long days rose and fell.
  Ere I was made
What wild things nested in the heart of them,
  What rivers ran
In rippling freedom at your feet?
  Ere we began
O silent watcher of the night,
  What moons have shone
When watching for my race to come,
  You stood alone!

Wind and wave, and but a space away
The rockbound coast,
Drone out the passing of the years,
An innumerable host.
Within the far, high reaches of the sky
A whisper grows,
Great branches stir, or is it but a sigh
For us, immutable, with woes?
Giant Sequoia, tree with latin name,
High priest beside the human gate,
Lord Bishop of the splendid hills,
Untouched by fate,
A restless human humbly comes to thee
Where you in benediction stand
And asks your blessing as he passes through,
A younger brother in the land.

CALIFORNIA: THE DAWN

Now comes the Painter with a brush sublime
And where before had stretched the silver sea,
A gray ghost ever marking time
Against the pulse beats of eternity,
The rich warm glories of the day descend
In gold, in orange, and in crimson lanes,
Onsweeping in the paths that never end.
Then lavishly as one who scarcely deigns
Be niggardly he sweeps a brush
Across the great broad velvet land.
And in the vivid, quivering hush
That runs from mountain top to golden strand
One feels that here at last a day is born
That no black painter of the night can wipe away:
At least, so I have felt in California's morn
That here upon the peaks of dawn had come a final day.

THE PURPLE PATH

The purple path is a royal road that leads you on to a gay abode

Where dreams, if they don't indeed come true, come as close as they can to you;

Where you pinch yourself as you view the skies and the gorgeous gardens stun your eyes,

And you drink the ocean and eat the land and grab some friend by his outstretched hand,

And say, "Great Scott, but I'm glad I'm here, especially, George, at this time of year."

And then in the Spring you take your grip and you go by train or go by ship,

Or whatever it is that will take you there when you MUST go home: and then grim care

Will sit on your shoulders and grin and jeer, and you'll wish, old man, that you'd stayed out here,

And filled your pipe and sat in the sun where the purple dreams pass one by one,

And you'll blink your eyes and you'll often feel (when you get back home) that it wasn't real.

But it's ten to one that another year will find you settled and living here,

Believing, I'm sure, as I do, too, that purple dreams in the sun come true.

THE DAY IS HUNG WITH HELIOTROPE

The day is hung with heliotrope,
And the poppy flames, and the buds of hope
Are opening here, each branch athrill.
Each hour that passes glows and dies
With joyous face to the radiant skies:
Each night that follows sounds the drum
Of still more cheerful days to come.
And over the highways autos fling
Their whirring wheels that forever sing,
And down the valleys and up the hills
The road lies open and one who wills
May leave Grim Trouble and woo Bright Hope
Where the days are hung with heliotrope.

TORCH AND FLAME

Here where the feet of the puleing world are pounding the pavements down

There stands a Mission old and gray in the heart of a busy town;

Faded the walls and dim the aisles, but here by the grace of God,

Once in the long-departed past the feet of the Padres trod.

The sands of Time through the hour glass run, but the thing that the Padres did

Is Torch and Flame in the living day, and its light can not be hid.

Strange is the musk that scents this spot, as though those good gray friars

Were standing here in their shadow world; and when my spirit tires

I come to stand by these crumbling walls, and I think of those earnest men

Who when they were beaten stood four-square, and so earnestly fought again.

ROW ON ROW, THE ORANGE TREES

Row on row the orange trees in California stand

And when they blossom in the Spring the scent upon the land

Is pungent in the nose of day, and on the wings of air

Romance is blown up and down, indeed most everywhere.

Row on row the orange trees in California stand,

The good brown mountains at their back, their feet upon the land,

And overhead the bright blue sky, and to the West the sea.

And was there ever such a land, old friend, for you and me?

L'ENVOI

Upon the face of day the curtain falls.
'Tis night. And now, regardless of the one who calls,
This fact remains: our friend, and all she was, has passed
You may dispute, deny, and claim the day at last
As one who on the morrow comes again,
Still kind, still glad to mother breeds of men;
Yet still this fact remains: death, grim death, has come our
way,
For when the lady lifts her veil—Ah ha! ANOTHER day!
And so the final word that's said is ever this—GOODBYE!
Oh, only for a time you say? Well, also—so say I!

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